

SKETCHES IN LYRIC PROSE AND VERSE

NATALIE WHITTED PRICE

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**SKETCHES IN LYRIC PROSE
AND VERSE**

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Number.....

**SKETCHES
IN LYRIC PROSE
AND VERSE**

BY
NATALIE WHITTED PRICE



Ralph Fletcher Seymour
Publisher Chicago

**Copyright 1920
by
Natalie Whitted Price**

To my comrade

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**SKETCHES IN LYRIC PROSE
AND VERSE**

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SPRING

An Allegory



PRING, passing on her way, came to a hill-crest, where Ennui reclined, wrapped in the sleep of weariness. Upon the crusty leaves of winter's hoarding his frame lay motionless, in utter lassitude. So gentle was the tread of Spring, so mute her breath, that he awakened not at her approach. Perceiving him she smiled and drew near. Bending above him, she lifted from her brow a fragrant garland and placed it lightly on his own, and from her tasseled apron she drew a hundred roses, binding them with the tendrils of soft mosses, as a pillow for his head. The trailing vines about her feet she laced into a verdant spread with which she covered him, and dotted it with petaled stars of choicest hue; and in the heart of every flower, and through each palpitating leaf she breathed the fragrance of her own sweet self. With sunshine smiles she chased the shivering gnomes of winter from the surrounding wood, and from the silences she beckoned waiting birds and bade them sing a rhapsody.

All this accomplished she stood apart, and with a silent challenge moved her awakening wand o'er dreaming Ennui.

He stirred, and looked about in wonderment. Slowly his tired senses quickened, and in his veins suffused a fuller, warmer beat. A clearer vision lighted in his eye, and fancy lifted from his brow the shade of sombre thought. Despondency fell from him as embers from a flame-tipped branch, for lo! beholding Spring, he loved her! Her beauty charmed him; her sweet simplicity beguiled him; the dainty lightness of her limbs, the freshness of her all-pervading presence drew him.

Arising, he stood before her with outstretched arms, and as she yielded to love's sweet allurement he held her close, and said:

"Dear maid, I plight my troth to thee, and shall henceforth my full allegiance give thee; yet must I here confession make of my unworthiness. Along the way of life I have known many loves,—loves of the heart, beneficent and tender,—loves of the flesh, compelling, eager,—loves of the mind, stern creatures they,—and wanton loves, insatiate and bold. Too, phantom loves have lured me into tangled paths, and vanished like a wind-swept cloud. With each and all I have had intimate concern, and in these close relationships have suffered and have joyed to the full measure of my manhood's deep complexity. Yet, here you find me, solitary, for each in turn I have relinquished or abandoned in irritating unfulfillment or dull satiety, and back unto myself have drawn in futile contemplation of life's quest.

"Dear maiden, having thus my full confession made, may I yet claim thy pure and gentle heart?"

Spring drew his cheek to hers and answer made:

Prose and Verse

"Fear not that I shall love thee less because thou hast not turned from life, nor that I could have loved thee more had life but passed thee by, for those grown wise through her tuition but bring to me a richer understanding of human strength and weakness, and hence a gentler toleration. And so, I plight my troth to thee, and give thee to my inmost life full access. I make no stipulation. I claim no vow. Nor do I fear to be betrayed; for never yet hath soul found weariness in me,—the deathless child of Nature,—Spring."

JOSEPHINE OF FRANCE*

I

AN empire is my pedestal! Proud sovereign of noble France am I, and consort of a victor who bears the conquered flags of Europe as trophy to his genius! Scorning the patronizing touch of Church and State, his hands have placed upon my brow the jeweled emblem of supremacy, to match His Majesty in place and power. His hands, that know so well the sweet caress of love, have fashioned by their magic strength a throne whereon I stand beside him, proud, triumphant. The pageantry of her, my predecessor, was paltry compared to this my dower. Hers was the accident of birth; mine is achieved by conquest and acclaim, and nobly won by his unconquerable will. Poor Antoinette! bartered by state, and wived to opulent satiety, to be at last the victim of vain greed and gluttony,—the tragic toy of fallen monarchy!

*Part No. I is a soliloquy of Josephine when she is the wife of Napoleon and Empress of France. Part No. II is when she has been divorced by him, and at Malmaison, near Paris, she lives in solitude, supplanted in place and power by Marie Louise, who becomes the mother of his son. The birth of this son is made known to Josephine by the firing of cannon. It has been said that Napoleon's motive for divorcing Josephine arose from his ambition for succession of rule through an heir.

Prose and Verse

Empress of France am I, yet much less queen than woman; loving the caress and whispered confidence of my beloved spouse far more than all the panoply of power; more dear to me by far his loving touch than are the jewels of my crown or all they symbolize. * * * Incarnate woman, I, encompassing in mind and heart the fatuous foibles and the yearnings, the terrors and the triumphs, the fears and fancies, the passions and the silent sorrows of the eternal and everlasting She. Incarnate woman, I; mate of the male, mother to his young, comrade and wife, consort and queen,—man's complement and equal in life's achievement. * * *

These little hands, * * * how fragile are they, and how fair! Embellished with bright jewels and perfumed like unto a budding flower. Hands fashioned to caress a baby's cheek, to fondle, and to lace themselves through strands of silken hair. Frail, tender hands, to be uplifted in pious supplication or extended in maternal benediction. Hands to be warmly clasped by love and pulse in quick response to its awakening touch. Yet, potent hands are they; yea, strong as death. Hands of your Josephine, my lord! Hold, hold them tight! You have not climbed alone the path of glory! You need these little hands!

II

Alas, these little hands! how tense and lean and impotent they have become! * * * These lips that love has sated, how dry and hungry now! * * * This heart that beat so vibrant 'gainst his

own, how leaden does it lie against my numbing flesh! * * * Ambition! Can it be that it has crept into his heart and smothered his dear love for me! Ambition! * * * Has it made of me a bagatelle, a plaything, to be discarded at its bidding? I?—I?—the peerless Josephine?—the idol of his eager passion, the sharer of his early triumphs, the fond and faithful comrade of his glorious manhood?—

Ah, little hands, where are your hold—your subtlety—your sweet allurement?—And I, incarnate woman, what demoniac fate has robbed me of the culmination of my loving wifehood, while she, the daughter of an alien, gives unto France his child? * * *

Alas, as barren as a severed bough life lies before me, and long, lean years reach onward mockingly.

Hark! 'Tis the cannon's note! One,—* * * two—a son is born to France! His son—and hers!—Dear Lord, forgive that I should covet her this hour!—But no! for I am Josephine! And no ignoble thought shall stain my heart!

For love of him—my Emperor, and France—fair, lovely France, I here renunciation make, and purge my soul of self!

Vive l'enfant Bonaparte!

Vive! Vive la France!

REVERIE

(To G. L. K.)

We sat upon the grass that summer's day, together, you and I.

Around us circled nature's green-clad sentinels, making inviolate the quietude.

O'erhead a white-winged pigeon passed, unheeding, to its mate, and downy pollen drifted 'round about us on the caressing breeze.

Nearby the Grecian columns of a temple gleamed reposefully, and seemingly to chide such dignity a leafy bough leaned playfully above your shoulder and tapped its fragrant kisses on your cheek.

We sat upon the grass,—the gentle, healing grass, together, you and I.

The agitating past receded into sweet forgetfulness, and the insatiate future withheld for that kind hour its greedy claims.

All weariness of heart and stress of mind resolved into the realm of vanished dreams.

We sat upon the grass together, you and I, and since that summer's day all days hold something of that hour,—something of its benign simplicity and its mysterious wonder.

One day I shall be laid beneath the grass, but through kind nature's transmutation I shall transverse dividing space!

I shall become the wind, to wrap myself about you. * * *

I shall become a sunbeam, to warm and cheer you. * * *

I shall ride the vaporous cloud to fall a crystal drop upon your brow, or rest, a gleaming jewel, in the flower you cull. * * *

I shall glisten on the wing of blue-birds nesting near your window, and whose song shall flood your soul with memories of me. * * *

I shall visit you in day-dreams, to share your solitude, and you shall find me in the darkness that brings you restful sleep. * * *

Commingled with the elements I shall encompass you, and not an hour shall pass but that in still, small voice I shall make known to you my presence. * * *

Yea, in your very heart I shall pulsate, component of your sentient being.

And when you, too, have passed from life's encircling hold, then the infinitudes shall be our pathless realm, and atom unto atom companioned we shall mingle in the music of the spheres.

CLEOPATRA
(Soliloquy)

THE daughter of a hundred kings am I, yet slave to that fair god who rules without a scepter or a crown. The pride of all the Ptolemys flows in my veins, yet do I bow an humble and submissive subject to Love. * * * Ah, Antony, that Egypt's queen should yield to thy seduction! And yet, what kingdom is worth thy fervent kiss? What pride of pedigree can match the glory of thy passion? I would relinquish all to be thy honored and beloved mate, nor could it so have been but for the qualities which make me queen in spirit; for of so noble mind art thou,—of such surpassing parts, that only greatness matching e'en thine own could have enthralled thee. * * * And Caesar Augustus, can he draw thee hence to leave me desolate! No, by my life I swear that never Cleopatra's abdication shall swell his triumphs! My Antony shall know no subjugation but that of my caresses, and Rome with all her power cannot subdue the will of Egypt. * * *

How fair the sunlight falls about me and mellows by its touch the polished marble of this floor!
* * * How green and fertile stretches yonder the valley of the Nile! The Nile,—making fecund the desert, and enameling with riches the full expanse

of my beloved realm! The Nile,—cradle of earth's most ancient race! The Nile,—winding like a ribbon about the tombs where rest my ancestors,—tombs built of time and glory into majestic pyramids which clasp the girdle of the Orient. * * * And these grey pyramids, hoary with age, locked in mysterious history, writ deep with the traditions of a dynasty,—shall they become defiled by alien hands and despoiled of all their kingly treasure? Shall those dim halls of sacred dead be invaded by vandals, and Egypt's crypted kings be scoffed at by unholy tongues? No! By the heritage my fathers bore me, I shall maintain the sanctity of their repose, and in myself uphold the glory of their name! Love may obsess the woman, but Egypt's queen shall still be Egypt's queen, and wifehood shall not rob her of her majesty nor stain the honor of her crown. * * * Hark! In that step a menace grips my heart! What portend doth it bear? * * * And that knock * * * it echoes like a doom against the portals of my mind. * * * Attend, good slave. Give entrance. * * * A message from the foul intruder? * * * Unroll the scroll, and read. * * * Enough! Say unto Caesar that Cleopatra makes no capitulation, and yields no jot or tittle of her heritage to any! Be-gone! * * * Iris,—Charmion,—my queenly vestments and my jewels! Bind on my brow the pearls of Ecuador, and on my wrists clasp turquoise bands. About my throat twine gleaming strands with sparkling pendants, and place my scepter near at hand! No cringing suppliant shall

Prose and Verse

meet the enemy, but one caparisoned as queen, and of
a purpose to command!

My heart shall still be Antony's, but Egypt claims
for aye my soul!

HER HAND

(To G. L. K.)

I STROKE the hand of my belovèd and contemplate its facile power to lead my spirit through paths of melody into the realm of fancy.

On waves of harmony it lifts my senses out of corporal self and into that mysterious country, the principality of genius.

I follow, follow, as my belovèd leads, and enter in processional that tone cathedral where kneel the worshipers of beauty. In reverence I bow, recipient of its benediction, and rise refreshed and chastened.

I follow, follow on, as the hand of my belovèd leads, to tread green pastures and walk beside still waters. The scent of budding leaves and fragrant grasses, the whir of wings, the touch of mellow earth lull me to sweet tranquillity, and I linger there in pastoral content.

Again the hand of my belovèd leads where valor stands triumphant. The martial call, the requiem of fallen brave, each draws me as that hand may beckon.

Into the sumptuous Orient's heart, the mystic desert's solitude, afar, anear, I follow, follow.

But best of all I love the hand of my belovèd when of her own true heart it melodizes and I am drawn into the star-draped chamber of her inner self. There

Prose and Verse

do I yield in full abandon to the beauty which her nature wreathes about me. There does that magic hand reveal to me life in fruition, renewing in my consciousness its highest import. There do I feel its ecstasies and tears, its sweeps of color and its hueless voids.

Oh, wondrous hand, to weave in tapestries of tone such fancies rare and themes sublime!—to lift on undulating sound this feeble spirit to the infinite!

I stroke the hand of my belovèd, marveling at so divine an instrument.

In fervent gratitude I press my lips to the fair, potent hand of my belovèd.

MY MOODS

I LOVE my moods. They are my comrades,—my play-fellows by day, my bed-fellows by night. They bring me no reproach, no criticism; they carry no regret and offer no antagonisms; they cost me no exertion and occasion no expense. And yet I owe them much,—these straggling visitors, these jack-o'-lantern creatures, these vagrant, variant comrades. Like unto the pages of the book of life are they. Aye, they are life, re-touched by the mysterious brush of memory.

There is the intellectual mood, when my mind wanders in the clean realm of thought,—that wind-swept sky where no emotion penetrates. In it I find the stimulus of wine,—white, limpid wine, and grow drunken on abstrusities, revel in mental labyrinths, and return to find a warm body awaiting the descent,—a tired, hungry body full of human sensibilities, eager impulses and desires.

Then there is the mood to leave behind me the pave, the peak of spire, the strain and stress of this big town, and roam complacently the lanes and fields;—to intimately touch the leaves and grasses, to listen to the creatures of the forest, to hug the homely trunk of weather-beaten trees, and sense the one-

Prose and Verse

ness of myself and earth as prone I lie against its mellow surface. This yearning quite obsesses me at times and sinks down deep into my consciousness.

Too, there is the mood to mix and mingle with my kind,—the human friendship mood. In this I want the clasp of sympathetic hands,—to laugh, to talk of household commonplaces, to exchange a jolly story, to sing or hear a quaint old ditty, to romp with children, and to chatter about clothes and folks and folderols.

And then the mood of books and music comes to me, and all the charm of art beguiles me. I lend myself to fancy's themes in poetry, in romance and in essay. I follow genius into heights sublime, and grow expansive in comprehensive thought and feeling. The sensuous call of music stirs my sensibilities; I hear anew old melodies and winding harmonies. The weird lament of Canio, the pastoreale of Manon, the apotheosis of Marguerite,—all merge and mingle in my memory, and every sense is lulled or quickened by undulating sound; I am in tune with all the universe and seem myself a note of some great anthem.

These moods are all expressed,—become a part of outward living; but there is one too intimate and tender to disclose to any. It is the mood of You,—You and the Dawn.

Relaxed by sleep your head rests softly in the curve of my warm neck, your moist breath falling like a

caress across my bosom; my arm enfolds your shoulder and my hand lies close above your heart. Dawn filters slowly through the draperies of the window and reveals in silhouette your profile 'gainst my breast. Ah, the kindly dawn,—veiling yet disclosing your face there; veiling its every trace of time, of stress, of pain,—disclosing its strong beauty, its nobility, its mobile gentleness. I lean my cheek against the cushion of your hair and contemplate:
You and the Dawn * * *

What matter that the dawn portends the scorching noon-tide,—the melancholy night? My mood of you excludes them, quite. A deep unspeakable content pervades my mind and fills my heart,—the sweet content of life's fulfillment.

The while my mood of you abides there is to me no other thing in time or space than this:

You—and the Dawn.

TO A PINE TREE

IN solitude's immensity,
With brow serene and high,
A silhouette of density
Against the bending sky,
With roots locked 'round the nurturing veins
Of mother nature's breast,
And arms outstretched to winds and rains
From vaults of east and west;—
A better type I could not need
Of perfect strength and calm,
No fears to fight, no hopes to feed,
No dreams of help or harm.
Glad would I be to lay this shell
Harassed by human strife
Upon the mound which feeds so well
Thy strong and simple life;—
To feel these restless atoms flow
Through nature's heart to thee,
And by this transmutation know
Thy great serenity.

SONG

SKYLARK! Have you heard the news?
Summer, wondrous summer is begun!

 Ah, I would soar with you
 Into the mystic blue,
Singing to the summer sun!

Starling! Have you heard the news?
Summer, red-lipped summer is begun!

 Yea, she has climbed from snows
 Into the heart of the rose,
Blooming in love's summer sun!

IN THE PARK

A GIANT disc of scarlet poppies spreads at my feet,—
A mat of flame upon the green expanse.

The gleam and glow of this incarnate thing
Exhales, as 'twere, a subtle incense
Which wreathes itself about me
And stirs to mutiny my senses.
Yearnings that I had shrived and laid away
Quicken derisively,
And unliv'd ecstasies lay hold upon me
And clamor for fulfillment.

Alas, these ruddy petals
Do but flaunt their sensuous beauty
To lash a vain desire and mock my loneliness.

O, little hurrying cloud, I beg you stoop,
Enfold me in your cooling veil,
And on the bosom of the wind dispel this pulsing
want!
Or bear me to some solitary niche of earth
Where dull despair and I may lie together in aban-
don.

BUTTERFLIES

BUTTERFLIES! Butterflies! Wings of my spirit!
Floating afar over meadow and sea;
Colorful fragments that shimmer and glisten,
Tinged with the sadness and gladness of me.

There on a daffodil, poised like a jewel;
Yonder aloft, like a sun-beam at play;
Butterflies pale as a maiden's first sorrow;
Butterflies bright as her nuptial day.

There is sweet Faith, in novitiate whiteness!
Ah, but those velvety stiples of doubt
Dotting with purple thy sails, my beauty!
Nor can the sweep of the winds fan them out.

Yonder is Hope, evanescent and golden!
Sail on and upward, my radiant one!
Touch not thy frail wing to earth, lest it falter!
Winnow thy flight to the cloud-pillowed sun!

Love, too, is there, undulating, seductive,
Wafting a kiss to the dewy wild-rose;
Flirting with flag-lily, flox and red-clover,
Palpitant, teasing, with never repose.

Butterflies! Butterflies! Tell me, whence come ye?
Wherfore not tarry a moment today?

Prose and Verse

Whither disperse ye from my verdant meadows?
What is it beckons and lures you away?

Faith, Hope and Love I would name you, my treasures;

Yea, too, wan Sorrow, and pensive Regret;
Mingling and vanishing, exquisite shadow-shapes
Tracing on azure life's mute silhouette.

Butterflies! Butterflies! Wings of my spirit!
Pathless and silent ye're come and are gone!
Out of the nothingness—into the nowhere;
Fringed with the darkness and flecked with the dawn.

YOUR VOICE

(To M. W.)

I STOOD amid the multitude, a-weary, and there seemed
No thing attuned unto myself, no heart that understood
The sob and smile within my own, amid that multitude.

And then, one day I heard your voice,
And, hearing, was at rest.

So deep, so warm, so tender is your understanding heart,
So rich, so sweet, so wonderful the music in your soul,
That I thereby am put in chord with all the multitude;
For in your voice humanity
Doth sob and smile.

Prose and Verse

O'ER THE WAY

OFT in the stilly night, across the way
I hear a little child cry plaintively,
And well I know a gentle hand
Soothes it again to slumberland,—
 Dear little love-flower o'er the way.

My hands lie impotently on my breast,
Where never baby-head shall stir or rest.
Sleep beckons, and in realms divine
I clasp a star-child that is mine,—
 My little dream-flower o'er the way.

LINES SENT WITH A MINIATURE

IF in this pictured face you can but trace
A memory that stirs your heart to cheer,
Or if you find therein a might-have-been
To muse o'er when no other face is near,
Then let your finger-tips,—perchance your lips,
Lay gently there a lingering caress,
And at your touch I swear you shall find there
Sentient response to that mute tenderness.

TO A LITTLE OLD-FASHIONED GIRL*

IN a simple and dust-tarnished frame on the wall
Hangs an old-timey likeness, faded and small,
Just a quaint little girl, with a prim, sawdust doll,—

A dear little old-fashioned girl.

She sits very straight, in a cane-seated chair;
A smooth little head-band holds back her hair;
And her copper-toed shoes are so tiny and queer;—

A dear little old-fashioned girl.

Oh, dear little girl, how I wish you could say
What your thoughts are, and if you are living today!
Are you still fair and rosy? or feeble and gray?

You dear little old-fashioned girl!

In place of your doll, with its stiff, china hair
Does a soft little babe of your own nestle there?
Are your days full of drizzle? or sunny and fair,

My dear little old-fashioned girl?

You look at me earnestly. Maybe you know
That I, too, was a little girl once—long ago.
It seems like a beautiful dream, but it's so,

My dear little old-fashioned girl!

And you somehow bring into the hurrying days
The quieting charm of your own simple ways,

Sketches in Lyric

That cheers me and soothes me, and tranquilly stays,
You dear little old-fashioned girl.

You sit very still, and you say not a word,
But deep in my heart your sweet prattle is heard
Like the ripple of water, or warble of bird,
 You dear little old-fashioned girl!

Your sweet presence glows like a beautiful star;
So calm and so fair, though so dim and so far;
And I love you because you are just what you are,—
 A dear little old-fashioned girl.

*An edition of this poem with musical accompaniment by the author is published by Clayton F. Summy Co., Chicago, through whose kind permission the lines are here printed.

MA BELLE

(To H. B.)

A GLEAMING coil of silken strands,
Touched by the sun-god's dimpled hands,
A subtle fragrance on the air,—
Her hair.

A bit of dusk, a bit of light,
A lingering sunbeam kissed by night,
Mirth's scimitar, truth's paradise,—
Her eyes.

A bow of rose-leaves strung with pearls,
A cupid shaking saucy curls,
A flower where joy sweet nectar sips,—
Her lips.

A blue-bell rung by elfin hands,
A fountain spraying on white sands,
A teasing bit of golden chaff,—
Her laugh.

A velvet rose of nameless hue,
Warm as the sun, fresh as the dew,
Here let my cheek be mutely pressed;—
Her breast.

THE TREASURE-BOX*

(Of Ninon de Lenclos)

HOW smooth is its ebony surface! How fine
And mellow the trace of this ivory line!
How well it has guarded through each passing year
The treasures that now lie disclosed to me here!

A packet of letters! Ah, 'twas with young hands
I folded them under these delicate bands!
How well I remember the day that we met! * * *
Yes, yes, at Verona; I could not forget
The gown that I wore! 'Twas my first polonaise—
A buff-colored satin with violet sprays.
Throughout the whole season these love-missives
came, * * *
And yet I recall not the dear fellow's name!

And this bizarre girdle from old Trinidad
I wore at de Maintenon's bal masquerade!
'Tis broken. Ah, yes, 'twas crushed I've no doubt
By the too ardent pressure of arms thereabout!
'Twas only the clasp of my corsage, withal,
That yielded its hold at de Maintenon's ball!

Prose and Verse

And, pray, what avail were the ruse of disguise
If prudery still held her mask o'er the eyes?

And this! * * * Can it be that flower may fold
In its petals the kiss that was pressed there of
old?

That its color may vanish, its fragrance may die,
Yet shroud the warm tear of a sorrowing eye?

E'en so, I swear by this frivolous fan—
This sweet-scented, sandal-wood breath of
Japan—

That nothing of cheerlessness shall you impart,
And only your beauty shall dwell in my heart.

A bit of old lace from the sleeve of Condé!—
A dance-programme bearing the arms of
d'Estrées!—

And this quaint medallion encircled with blue—
From my red-robed adorer, Richelieu!

What lovers to contemplate!—aged and young!
What eager vows whispered! What madrigals
sung!

This sonnet La Rochefoucauld penned with such art
Were enough to subdue e'en a termagant's heart!

Ah, drear were the autumn of life did not Spring
On memory's canvas her daffodils fling!

And wisdom would be but a dullard, forsooth,
Had folly not schooled him a bit in his youth!

I close your smooth lid, I turn your small key,
Consigning to silence these phantoms of me;—

The coqueties, sophistries, laughter and love
I garnered from life, here to be treasure-trove,—
That only your depths and my day-dreams may know
The colorful past of Ninon de Lenclos.

*Madame de Lenclos: Born at Paris, 1616: died there 1706: A noted French woman of pleasure. She retained her beauty and charm to a very old age. She received the highest society in her salon, which was compared for its tone with the Hotel Rambouillet. Madame Scarron (afterward de Maintenon), Madame de Lafayette and Christina of Sweden were her friends. St. Evremond, La Rochefoucauld, D'Estrées, the great Condé and three generations of the family of Sévigné were among her lovers. According to Voltaire Richelieu was the first of these.

The Century Dictionary and Encyclopedia.

A SOUTHERN VALENTINE

I HEAR the katy-did a-scrapin' on his silver wing,
Beseechin' little katy-did to come an' hear him sing;

I see the fire-fly sittin' on the sweet-potato-vine,
Tryin' to coax his lady-love to come and see him
shine;

I hear the water tricklin' through the shadows 'roun'
the mill,

A-lookin' for the sunbeam that kissed it on the hill;

I smell the yellow honey-suckle by the window-pane
As it sends its fragrance searchin' for its lover-lass,
the rain;

I hear the whippoor-will a-callin' from the meadow
gate,

Sort o' sad and lonesome-like, unto his absent mate;

So with all these little lovers I fell to lovin', too;
And it set my heart to singin', and I send the song
to you.

THE LITTLE RING

THE little ring you gave to me
I yet shall hold,
And to my lips shall nightly press
Its rim of gold;
Against my heart when life is done
It still shall lie,
Dear symbol of a perfect love
That cannot die.

MEMORY

O H Memory, thou phantom child,
I know not whence thou'rt come,
Nor if in other realms than this
My heart shall be thy home;
But while thou'rt mine I'll hold thee close
And thy caress beguile,
As to thy lips my own I press
With tears or smile.

THE TRUNDLE-BED*

I SOMETIMES draw apart the heavy curtain of
the years

And look into the dim and tender past;
Again a little child I seem,—a child of smiles and
tears,

Such as in memory you,—and you, hold fast.
The busy day is ended; the toys are laid away,
The “Now I lay me” said in cozy gown,
And ’neath the flow’ry patch-work quilt, where fire-
light shadows play,
Into my trundle-bed I nestle down.

No art was used to fashion that little trundle-bed;
No rare tradition marks its history;
And yet about its simple frame, from stubby foot to
head,

There seems to dwell a hallowed mystery—
The mystery of mother-love, that wreathes itself
about

The curly head there pillow'd with such care,
And like a benediction, caressing and devout,
I hear again the old, familiar air:
“Hush my dear, lie still and slumber,
Holy angels guard thy bed.”

We leave without regret youth's painted toys along
the way,

As the tomorrows glide into the past,
And in our turn take up life's work, or enter in its
play,

But one dear vision hold we to the last.
'Tis the vision of a gentle mother bending o'er her
child,

With ever patient touch and gentle tread;
And back to tranquil yesterdays our hearts are still
beguiled,

In day-dreams of a little trundle-bed.

*An edition of this poem with musical accompaniment by the author is published by Clayton F. Summy Co., Chicago, through whose kind permission the lines are here printed.

YOU

(To O. L.)

WHAT is the charm of you? Whence the allure
of you?

This do I ask as I look in the face of you.
Is it the womanly courage and cheer of you?
Is it the tenderness pearling the tear of you?
Is it the mien of you, gracious and kind?
Is it the myriad reach of your mind?
Is it the sweet little devil that peeks at you
Out of the rose-cups that dimple the cheeks of you?
Is it the gentle and delicate art of you?
Is it the wonderful, wonderful heart of you?

Ah, it is every delectable bit of you,
From tippy-toes to the fair-templed wit of you;
Happily yield I in full to the thrall of you,
All-of-me loving the exquisite all-of-you.

THE DESK CLERK

I STAND as a shackled slave, enstalled by the grip
of fate,
'Round me the mortised town pulsing with love and
hate;
Haltered to pen and file early and late I stand;
Tethered to desk and stool, brain and limb and hand.

The bigness of all the past, the beauty of eons gone
Verge in my spirit's depths—merge in unuttered
song;
The sorrow of dying worlds moans in my pregnant
heart,
Dear human love and joy there mingle and depart.

And each through the days' routine calls to my soul
for birth,
Calls from the vast unknown here to my niche on
earth;
Bitter their plea, yet sweet as the fall of rain on my
face,
Here in my little stall, wedged midst the common-
place.

He who has basked on the soil, bathed in the winds
of the plain,

Prose and Verse

Cannot grant lease of his soul, be it for love or for
gain;

Having communed with the stars still in his dreams
they shall glow;

That which they gave he shall keep; that which they
taught he shall know.

So, to my stall in the mart measureless riches I bring;
Into the drab of the hours golden-hued fancies I fling;
Into the murk of the days flows all the crimson and
mauve

I gleaned from the sun-dowered fields and culled
from the shadow-flecked grove.

YOUR DAY-DREAMS*

DREAM on, dear child, dream on;
Dream while the spring is in your heart!
Dream of white butterflies a-wing,
And rose-rimmed clouds that dance apart!

Dream on, my lad, dream on;
Dream of green hills beyond, afar!
Dream of the sun-kissed path that leads
Across them to the distant star!

Dream on, comrade, yea, dream!
Follow your vision up and on;
Blend with the days' dull commonplace
The sweet fulgence of the dawn.

Dream on, dear heart, dream on!
Dream while life's mystic web you weave,
For at the last 'twill hold no stran
More fair than dreams you now conceive.

Dream on, beloved, dream!
Dream high,—dream straight,—dream true!
For in the realm of the unseen
Dreams are the soul of you.

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CAP AND BELLS

LOVE came to me one day, and laughing said,
"How do you like my bells and cap of red?"
Said I, "They're much too frivolous and gay!"
He turned upon his heel and skipped away.

Years passed. Love came again, and mutely stood.
His brow was shadowed by grief's sombre hood.
I took him to my heart, and pray that there
We'll find the cap and bells he used to wear.

RETRIBUTION

I PLUCKED a rose
And pressed my hungry lips into its heart;
The fragile thing
At my too eager touch crumbled apart;
With swift remorse
I sought to fold its petals close again,
Only to find
Them spread upon my palm like crimson stain.

OCTOBER

I WALKED through the woods on yesterday;
The leaves lay dead at my feet;
They rustled in jest
Then sank to rest,
Awaiting their shroud of sleet.
A lonely thrush sang a requiem
'Neath the wooded dome o'erhead,
Then took his flight
With the coming night,
And left me there with the dead.

I roamed through the past on yesterday;
Life's joys lay pallid and sweet;
So tenderly fair
They rested there,
Dead as the leaves at my feet.
I sealed with a tear each silent bier,
And to youth I said good-by;
Then I turned with a will
To the star-crowned hill
Where life's achievements lie.

DAISY AND STAR

(To L. B.)

A STAR shone in heaven's dome, serene and far;
A simple daisy dared to love that star;
Rooted to earth she was, yet with delight
She reached with yearning toward that star each
night.
And lo! A star-beam stooped and kissed her face,
And spread its radiance in that lowly place.

Ah, love finds love's abode, though near or far.
I am that earth-bound flow'r; you are the star.

THE PATCH-WORK QUILT*

DID Grandma ever tell you about the patch-work
quilt
That lies across the sofa in her room?
It is made from scraps of dresses that she wore when
she was young,
And some of them were woven on a loom.
Sometimes when it is raining and I can't play out
of doors
She lets me spread it out upon the floor,
And as I choose the pieces I'd like to hear about
She tells me of the dresses that she wore.

It isn't just the dresses that Grandma tells about,—
It's the things that happened when she had them on;
And almost every piece that's in that dear old patch-
work quilt
Holds the mem'ry of a sorrow or a song.
Oh, things were very wonderful when Grandmama
was young;
You ought to hear her tell about it all!
The ladies all were beautiful, the children all were
good,
And the men were all so gallant and so tall!

Sketches in Lyric

She calls the quilt her memory-bed, and every little piece
Is a flower blooming in its scented fold;
There are red ones for the roses, and blues for "don't forgets,"
And yellow ones for sun-flowers of gold.
There's one she calls sweet-lavender, that smells like baby-clothes,
And one of purple, like the sun-set skies;
I never speak of these two, or the grey one like the rain,
For when I do dear Grandma always cries.

My Grandma told me once that life is just a patch-work quilt,
Of births and deaths and marriages and things,
And that sometimes when you're looking for a lovely piece of red
You only find a knot of faded strings;
But she says the red is redder when it's by a piece of brown,
And grey is not so grey by sunny gold.
Oh, I hope I'll have a lovely patch-work quilt, like Grandmama's,
To show to little children when I'm old.

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GRANDMA'S GARDEN

I KNOW a lovely garden where the sweetest flowers grow!

Oh, their beauty and their fragrance!—the dearest flowers I know;—

Just a quaint, old-fashioned garden, yet rare withal,
me-thinks,

Are its beds of—not carnations, but, well—they are just pinks.

'Tis through an old, old gateway, and I've heard
Grandma tell

How, when she was a maiden, Dan Cupid wove a
spell

About its mossy trellises, and through its pebbled
walks,

And shot his silver arrows among its pink-tipped
stalks.

And as I breathe the fragrance of these old-fashioned
flowers

My heart drinks from the chalice of those long-van-
ished hours;

For grandmas once were maidens, and Cupid would,
me-thinks,

Make maidens lovely grandmas, with gardens of
sweet pinks.

MAMMY'S SOLDIER-GAL*

IN the dewy morn of childhood there was ever at my side
A dear, old, black-faced mammy, my timid steps to guide;
All my childish troubles vanished,—flew away like frightened birds,
And my trembling lip grew steady when I'd hear old Mammy's words:

“Dar now, dar now, honey!
You aint a-gwine ter cry!
You'se Mammy's little soldier-gal,
An' dat's de reason why
You'se gwine ter stan' up straight, an' smile!
Dat's whut you is! Why, shoo!
Dat aint nuthin', honey,
Fo' a soldier-gal, lak you!”

The broken doll, or tea-set, the little bruised toe;
The have-tos and the mustn'ts,—the disappointing no,—
Each grief she helped to conquer one by one, and day by day,
For my pride and courage quickened when I'd hear old Mammy say:

“Dar now, dar now, honey!
Whut's dat in yo' eye?

Prose and Verse

You'se Mammy's little soldier-gal,
An' soldiers dey don' cry!
You'se gwine ter stan' up straight, an' smile!
Dat's it! Dat's it! Why, shoo!
Dat aint nuthin', honey,
Fo' a soldier-gal, lak you."

Many years ago dear Mammy went to sleep, with
folded hands;
Yet sometimes her little soldier feels that Mammy
understands
When the cherished toys lie shattered, and the ugly
bruises pain,
For a voice seems calling, calling, like an echo
through the rain:
"Dar now, dar now, honey,
You aint a-gwine ter cry!
You'se Mammy's little soldier-gal,
An' dat's de reason why
You'se gwine ter stan' up straight, an' smile,
Jes' lak you used to do!
Dat aint nuthin', honey,
Fo' a soldier-gal, lak you."

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FLOWER AND MAID

S
AID the bee unto the flower:
“Let me of your honey sip!”
Said the man unto the maiden:
“Let me kiss your glowing lip!”

“Drink thou freely,” said the flower;
“I but bloom my sweets to give.”
“Aye, my love,” replied the maiden,
“Tis in giving that I live.”

And the flower, still a flower,
Bloomed serene, with heart of flame;
But the maid, no longer maiden
Wore the scarlet badge of shame.

MY CASTLE

I BUILDED me a castle, a castle in the air;
'Twas fashioned in a day-dream, and it was wond'rous
 fair;
Its turrets were of star-stuff, its dome was azure-
 browed;
Its far-spread terraces were laid with mauve and
 crimson cloud.

And in my phantom castle no servient vassal knelt;
There, panoplied in purple, no sceptered monarch
 dwelt;
No footstep passed its portals, no voice stirred in its
 halls;
Only my treasured fancies peopled its ambient walls.

My castle—shall it vanish? No; by my life I swear
That till I've drained love's chalice I shall hold revel
 there.

THE WOOING

IN a garden of glad flowers
Wooed by summer sun and showers
Drooped a rose-bud on her stem;
Buds around her opening daily
Nodded to each other gaily,
But she seemed not one of them.

Ever there in silence bending,
Never from her bosom sending
 Breath of fragrance on the air;
Opening not to spray of fountain
Or to zephyr from the mountain
 She was passionless as fair.

Then the night-wind came and swayed her,
Boldly on his bosom laid her,
 Drew her to him, held her fast;
And her leaves relaxed their tightness
Round their shrine of virgin whiteness,
 Yielding there her heart at last.

To its purest depths she led him,
On its sweetest fragrance fed him
 Until all the night had flown;
And her sisters in the morning
Saw no bud that stem adorning,
 But a perfect rose, full blown.

THE PLEIADES

SEVEN fair sisters live up in the sky;
I wonder how ever they climbed so high!
They're dreadfully old, but they've never been wed;
They never were born, and they'll never be dead.
Every night when the sun goes down
They dress themselves each in a spangled gown;
And if it is fair they promenade there,—
These gay old girls in the sky!

Each wears a diamond upon her brow;—
'Twas the gift of some god, I'd almost vow!
Never a scandal has touched their name,
But even if naughty they'd not be to blame.
And I shouldn't wonder that many a lark
Is had up there—when the nights are dark;
With a cloud for a screen they couldn't be seen,—
These gay old girls in the sky!

I've seen them wink at the man in the moon
In spite of the lady he seems to spoon,
And the dipper I wager they'd drink quite dry
If it weren't that it's fastened so tight to the sky!
They shamelessly practice their cunning wiles
On old Orion, to win his smiles,

And it may be that yet he'll be caught in the net
Of these rollicking frolicking
Girls in the sky !

Now, if you are naughty, and don't say your prayers,
When you wend your way up the golden stairs
You'll not get a harp, and you'll not get a crown,
For old Saint Peter will turn you down !
But don't try to break through the golden gate,
Nor gloomily stand and bemoan your fate,
But just leave your card, and go in the big yard
And play with the gay little
Girls in the sky !

THEN AND NOW*

THEN—her length was twenty inches,
Now—her waist exceeds that girth;
Then—the moon was her desire,
Now—she simply wants the earth.

Then—she grasped a small tin rattle,
Now—she steers a limousine;
Then—her dress a simple cotton,
Now—it wears a dazzling sheen.

Then—one ringlet crowned her forehead,
Now—it's coifed with puffs and plat;
Then—a little cap of worsted,
Now—a fifty-dollar hat.

Then—her words were few and lisping,
Now—she doesn't lisp; she spiels;
Then—her little foot was sockless,
Now—she wears Du Barry heels.

Then—her jewels were but dimples,
Now—they sparkle like the sun;
Then—her day would end at twilight,
Now—at dusk it's just begun.

Sketches in Lyric

Then—her drink was white and luke-warm,
Now—it's amber, and is cold;
Then—it must be fresh, and sweetened,
Now—it's "dry," and very old.

Then—life's pendulum swung slowly,
Now—it's moving pretty fast;
Then—Mi-Nino, with a future,
Now—Milady, with a past.

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THE BEETLE PARTY

MISTRESS BEETLE gave a party
At the rose-bush by the wall;
She had a lovely programme
And refreshments for them all.
Miss Cricket sang a solo,
And Miss Honey-Bee sang, too,
Accompanied by Katy-Did,
Who scraped her wings 'most through!
They all enjoyed the menu;
The fresh honey was a treat;
'Twas served in rose-leaf saucers,
And was so cool and sweet!
The table was a toad-stool,
The eating-fork a thorn;
The dew was served in blue-bells
And was gathered fresh at morn.
Miss June-Bug's dress was gorgeous,
And when Miss Fire-Fly came
She made quite a sensation
In her handsome skirt of flame!
Miss Yellow-Jacket's costume
Was striped,—a perfect fit;
Her waist is much too slender
But she seems quite proud of it!
Miss Lady-Bug is charming;

She certainly looks well
In that polka-dotted satin.
She's decidedly a belle!
When the Spider-sisters entered
It created quite a din;
They really weren't invited!
They just happened to "drop in."
They're smart, but no one likes them;
They hardly left the wall;
They're not one bit attractive
And have no style at all!
Lord Caterpillar's getting fat;
He wore his overcoat.
It has a big fur collar
That comes up 'round his throat.
He must be quite rheumatic,
For he didn't take it off.
And little old Miss Frog was there!
She has an awful cough!
Miss Mosquito tried to gossip
With her naughty little wings;
Her voice is so unpleasant,
And she says such stinging things!
Miss Grass-Hopper seemed happy,
And wore her usual smile;
She's rather green and awkward, though;
I do not like her style;
She keeps her arms a-kimbo,
And her feet up near her waist;
Her manners are not graceful,
She moves with too much haste!
Grand-Daddy-Long-Legs came quite late,—

Prose and Verse

Walked all the way, I'm told;
He's really very dapper
For one considered old!
Some of them came in airplanes,
Each steering his machine;
As expert aviators
They're the best I've ever seen!

So, you see, the Beetle party
Was quite a smart affair!
Next time they're entertaining
I hope you'll all be there!

THE CELIBATE

A THISTLE searched the garden to choose a wife
for mate,
And having made a full survey he thus did contemplate:

"The bean is quite too stringy; the corn is over-tall;
The pumpkin is too portly; the pea is far too small;
The pepper is too saucy; the cabbage has no style;
The cucumber is seedy; the onion's breath is vile;
The beet is much too florid; the carrot is too lean;
The turnip is too squatty; the lettuce is too green.

"Indeed, I'll wed with none of them! 'Twould mortify my pride!"
And so he laid down by himself and shrivelled up
and died.

THE PROD*

“TICK, tock, tick, tock,”
The old clock said;
“It’s broad day light!
Better get out o’ bed!”
“Tick, tock, tick, tock,”
It said later on;
“Better get to bed!
The night’s ‘most gone!”

*An edition of this poem with musical accompaniment by the author is published by Clayton F. Summy Co., Chicago, through whose kind permission the lines are here printed.

AN EASTER IDYL*

I T'S just a little bonnet,
With a single rose upon it,
And the little face beneath it
Is quite serene and still;
But it took a week to buy it,
And it takes an hour to tie it,
And Heaven only knows how long
'Twill take to pay the bill!

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TWO MICE*

A MOUSE sat busily nibbling cheese.
It was a Mister Mouse, if you please.
In came a lady-mouse, trim and cute,
All dolled up in a grey suede suit.

Ho-ho!

The bit of cheese chanced to conceal
A little hook of sharpened steel,
And as he turned to meet her glance
The hook quite spoiled his little pants!

Oh! Oh!

Her flight was most abrupt, 'tis true;
But then, her nice grey suit was new!
And cautious lady-mice all know
Suede panties can't be made,—they grow!

Just so.

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TO THE HORSE I LEFT BEHIND ME

I
WANT you, Dolly Gray, so I do!
I want to roam the fragrant fields with you.
I want to stand beside you 'mid the hay;
I want to hear you stamp your foot and neigh;
I want to press your flank,—off and away!
Dolly Gray!

I want you, Dolly Gray, that I do!
I want to skirt the singing stream with you.
I want to feel the sun-shot air
Press on my brow and through my hair
And leave its gold-brown kisses there;
Dolly Gray!

I want you, Dolly Gray, so I do!
And by the gods I soon shall have you, too!
To far Arcadia's mystic zone
We two shall hasten—we alone!
Here's to you, silver pearl! my own
Dolly Gray!

COMPENSATION

IT'S a woolly old way we're trav'lin';
It's a gamble what's the end;
But there's one thing worth the journey,
And that one thing's a friend.

It's a tough old game that's runnin';
It takes nerve to play it through;
But the jack-pot's worth the ante
If it holds a friend or two.

FOOLS

A FOOL there was—yea, two there were,
To whom life's road spread wide;
They might have led the caravan;
Instead, they turned aside.

A fool there was—yea, there were two;
Love's flagon stood hard-by;
But being fools they left it there,
The while their lips were dry.

A fool there was—two fools were there,
Who let the years grow grey;
They might have strung them into hours
Of joyous roundelay.

A fool there was—and one fool more,—
A he-fool and a she,
Two faltering, fear-fettered fools,—
A you-fool and a me.

THE HANGING

“**W**ERE you ever at a hanging, Auntie dear?”
“Mercy, no!”

“Well, there’s surely going to be one now and here;
Let’s go!

It’s a wicked Chinese lady, dressed in red;
Come and see!

And she’s going to be left hanging till she’s dead!”
“Dear me!”

With a merry little twinkle in his eye,
Hurrying,

He led me down the hall to see her die;—
Poor thing!

Then climbing on a chair he hung her picture
On the wall,

And turned and looked at me and laughed and
laughed!

That’s all.

THE CRICKET

I LISTEN to the cricket; squeak, squeak, squawk;
My, I would be lonesome if I couldn't hear him talk!
I sit there by the fire when I'm s'posed to be in bed,
An' then all of a sudden I hear him scratch his head.

I wonder where he comes from, an' where he hides
away!

I never hear him chirping or see him in the day;
But every night he's down there in the corner by the
cat,

An' if I make a bit of noise he shuts up—just like
that!

If I'm quite still he tells me a-many a funny thing;
He says the room's a big world, an' that I am its
king!—

That the chair I'm in's a castle, an' the carpet is a
moat,

An' that the bed's an ocean and the pillow is a boat.

He calls the broom a gen'ral, with straws for soldier-
boys

That march, march, march, without a bit of noise;
An' that the lamp's a mountain where the sun's about
to set.

But if I crook my finger he shuts up—just like that!

Prose and Verse

'Nen, after while the fire goes out an' I jump into bed,
An' pull the sheet and blanket up all around my head,
An' he just talks me right to sleep—down in the cor-
ner there;
An' when I wake next mornin' I can't find him any-
where!

IF THE TREES COULD TALK

If the trees in the orchard could talk to me
Of the things they know, oh, how wise I'd be!
I'd know why the leaves are so green today
Instead of being all blue, or grey;
I'd know where the birds come from in the spring,
And where they learn all the songs they sing;
Oh, I'd get them to tell me everything—
If the trees could talk to me.

I'd learn all the secrets of the wind,
And where the blossoms their fragrance find;—
Why some are yellow and others white;
And what the katy-did chirps at night;
And how in the world a dew-drop knows
How to find the heart of the thirsty rose;
I'd know what the brook sings as it flows—
If the trees could talk to me.

I'd know why the song of the dove seems sad,
And that of the robin is always glad;
Why babies though different look the same;
And where did everything get its name;
And what holds up the big, blue sky;
And where do butterflies learn to fly;
No fairy would be so wise as I—
If the trees could talk to me.

Prose and Verse

But this I know, that truth is true;
That I am I, and you are you;
And I could not love you more than I do
If the trees could talk to me.

MAMMY'S LULLABY*

O H, de whip-poor-will is singin' in de twilight's spreadin' gloom,
An' de fire-light flickers dimly t'roo de shadders in de room,
An' my little dusky lambkin cuddles close to mammy's breast,
'Cause it's tired now, an' sleepy, an' it's foun' a place to rest.

Mammy's arms'll hol' it closely, mammy's heart'll keep it warm,
Mammy's love'll guide it safely t'roo de sunshine an' de storm;
Mammy's lips'll heal its bruises, mammy's breast'll soothe its cry,
Mammy's song'll lead it gently to de dream-lan' in de sky.

Like a little downy chicken 'neath de shelter o' de wing
It'll nes'le down a-chirpin' when it hears its mammy sing;
It's my cozy little cricket, it's my maple-sugar coon,
It's my pretty sweet-potato, it's my yaller rose o' June.

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